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Statement submitted by Population Action International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Achieving Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Context of International Migration

In 1994, the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) called for the achievement by 2015 of universal access to a package of basic reproductive health services and for specific measures to foster human development, with particular attention paid to women. Accompanying this call for universal access, the ICPD Programme of Action articulated the critical relevance of international migration to the global development agenda, calling for more transparent and regulated migration policies that first and foremost protect the rights of migrants.

Population Action International supports the United Nations Secretary-General and the ICPD Programme of Action in calling for the international community to increase its understanding of the dynamics of international migration and the potential implications for global development. Appropriate mechanisms to facilitate and regulate migration are required to ensure the protection of basic human rights for migrants, which includes full access to sexual and reproductive health services. All couples and individuals have the right to manage their own fertility in good health, regardless of their legal status in a country.

As stated in the Secretary-General's report, almost half of the world's international migrants are women; in some countries women comprise between 70 and 80 percent of the migrant population (E/CN.9/2006/4). Some research indicates language and cultural barriers impede the access to reproductive health information and services for some migrants.[1] Women are increasingly the primary movers, rather than the accompanying partners. The Secretary-General's report states, "Because women migrants are often found in gender-segregated and unregulated sectors of the economy, they are at a much higher risk of gender discrimination, violence and abuse." Refugees, especially refugee women and children, are particularly vulnerable to abuses and exploitation. The ICPD Programme of Action classifies health services, including family planning, as "necessary social services" for refugees.

Equal access to sexual and reproductive health services is a critical part of protecting the rights of migrant women, and thus enabling them to become productive members of a community. Moreover, in a world characterized by continuous movement, access to sexual and reproductive health services must be considered essential to sound public health practices. The United Nations and the entire international community must continue to address the root causes of gender inequality and the needs of women and girls. Access to sexual and reproductive health services is part and parcel of economic development efforts, and crucial to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The efforts of the United Nations to address these issues at the 39th Session of the Commission on Population and Development are commendable as a strategic first-step toward divulging the interlinkages between international migration trends and development aims. It is clear that these issues warrant global attention, as both the scale and frequency of human movements continue to grow. Further progress along these lines will require a supportive policy environment and international commitment to increased regulation of migration. However, ultimately, protecting the rights of migrants demands the long-term commitment of adequate human and financial resources dedicated to meeting the goals of ICPD. Fundamental development and poverty reduction goals, including the MDGs, will be futile without increased access to sexual and reproductive health services for all people.

Notes

[1] Sargent, Carolyn, "Counseling contraception in Malian migrants in Paris: global, state, and personal politics", *Human Organization*, summer 2005.